

Lesson Overview

The ICS Features and Principles lesson introduces you to:

- Use of common terminology.
- Incident facilities.
- Common ICS responsibilities.

Common Terminology

The ability to communicate within ICS is absolutely critical. Using standard or common terminology is essential to ensuring efficient, clear communication. ICS requires the use of common terminology, meaning standard titles for facilities and positions within the organization.

Common terminology also includes the use of "clear text"—that is, communication without the use of agency-specific codes or jargon. **In other words, use plain English.**

Organizational Elements and Resources

As you learned earlier, organizational elements require a consistent pattern for designating each level within the ICS organization.

Resources are also assigned common designations. Many kinds of resources may also be classified by type, which will indicate their capabilities (e.g., types of helicopters, sprayers, etc.).

Organizational Facilities

Common terminology is also used to define incident facilities, help clarify the activities that take place at a specific facility, and identify what members of the organization can be found there.

Incident facilities will be addressed in greater detail later in this lesson.

Use of Position Titles

As mentioned previously, ICS Command and General Staff positions have distinct titles.

- Only the Incident Commander is called Commander.
- Only the heads of the Sections in the General Staff are called Chiefs.

Learning and using this standard terminology helps reduce confusion between the day-to-day position occupied by an individual and his or her position at the incident.

Integrated Communications

Every incident requires a Communications Plan. Communications includes:

- The "hardware" systems that transfer information.
- Planning for the use of all available communications resources.
- The procedures and processes for transferring information internally and externally.

Communications needs for large incidents may exceed available radio frequencies. Some incidents are conducted entirely without radio support. In such situations, other communications resources (cell phones, alpha pagers, e-mail, and secure phone lines) may be the only communication methods used to coordinate communication and to transfer large amounts of data efficiently.

Incident Facilities

Incident activities may be accomplished from a variety of facilities. Facilities will be established depending on the kind and complexity of the incident or event. It is important to know and understand the names and functions of the principal ICS facilities.

Only those facilities needed for any given incident may be activated. Some incidents may require facilities not included in the standard list.

Incident Facilities Virtual Tour

The **Incident Command Post**, or ICP, is the location from which the Incident Commander oversees all incident operations. There is only one ICP for each incident or event. Every incident or event must have some form of an Incident Command Post. The ICP may be located in a vehicle, trailer, tent, or within a building. The ICP will be positioned outside of the present and potential hazard zone but close enough to the incident to maintain command.

Staging Areas are temporary locations at an incident where personnel and equipment are kept while waiting for tactical assignments. Staging Areas should be located close enough to the incident for a timely response, but far enough away to be out of the immediate impact zone. There may be more than one Staging Area at an incident. Each Staging Area will have a Staging Area Manager who reports to the Operations Section Chief or to the Incident Commander if an Operations Section has not been established.

A **Base** is the location from which primary logistics functions are coordinated and administered. The Base may be collocated with the Incident Command Post. There is only one Base per incident.

A **Camp** is the location where resources may be kept to support incident operations if a Base is not accessible to all resources. Not all incidents will have Camps.

A **Helibase** is the location from which helicopter-centered air operations are conducted. Helibases are generally used on a more long-term basis and include such services as fueling and maintenance.

Helispots are more temporary facilities used for loading and unloading personnel and cargo. Large incidents may require more than one Helibase and several Helispots.

General Guidelines—Lengthy Assignments

Many incidents last only a short time, and may not require travel. Other deployments may require a lengthy assignment away from home. Below are general guidelines for incidents requiring extended stays or travel:

- Assemble a travel kit containing any special technical information (e.g., maps, manuals, contact lists, and reference materials).
- Prepare personal items needed for your estimated length of stay, including medications, cash, credit cards, etc.
- Ensure that family members know your destination and how to contact you.
- Determine appropriate travel authorizations.
- Familiarize yourself with travel and transportation arrangements.
- Determine your return mode of transportation (if possible).
- Determine payroll procedures (at incident or through home agency).
- Be sure to take your passport and birth certificate for OCONUS assignments.

General Guidelines—Roles and Authorities

In addition to preparing for your travel arrangements, it is important to understand your role and authorities.

- Review your emergency assignment. Know who you will report to and what your position will be.
- Establish a clear understanding of your decisionmaking authority.
- Determine communications procedures for contacting your headquarters or home office (if necessary).
- Identify purchasing authority and procedures.
- Determine how food and lodging will be provided (incident, personal, and agency).

Actions Prior to Departure

Upon receiving an incident assignment, your deployment briefing should include, but may not be limited to, the following information:

- Incident type and name or designation
- Incident check-in location
- Specific assignment
- Reporting date and time
- Travel instructions
- Communications instructions
- Special support requirements (facilities, equipment transportation and off-loading, etc.)
- Travel authorization for air, rental car, lodging, meals, and incidental expenses

Check-In at the Incident: Activities

Check-in officially logs you in at the incident. The check-in process and information helps to:

- Ensure personnel accountability.
- Track resources.
- Prepare personnel for assignments and reassignments.
- Locate personnel in case of an emergency.
- Establish personnel time records and payroll documentation.
- Plan for releasing personnel.
- Organize the demobilization process.

Check-In at the Incident: Locations

Check in only once. Check-in locations may be found at several incident facilities, including:

- Incident Command Post (Resources Unit).
- Base or Camp(s).
- Staging Areas.
- Helibase.
- Note that these locations may not all be activated at every incident.

Check-in information is usually recorded on ICS Form 211, Check-In List.

Common Responsibilities at the Incident

After check-in, locate your incident supervisor and obtain your initial briefing. The briefing information helps you plan your tasks and communicate with others. Briefings received and given should include:

- Current situation assessment.
- Identification of your specific job responsibilities.
- Identification of coworkers.
- Location of work area.
- Identification of eating and sleeping arrangements, as appropriate.
- Procedural instructions for obtaining additional supplies, services, and personnel.
- Operational periods/work shifts.
- Required safety procedures and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), as appropriate.

Incident Recordkeeping

All incidents require some form of recordkeeping. Requirements vary depending upon the agencies involved and the nature of the incident. Detailed information on using ICS forms will be covered in other training sessions, or may be found in the Forms Manual.

Below are general guidelines for incident recordkeeping:

- Print or type all entries.
- Enter dates by month/day/year format.
- Enter date and time on all forms and records. Use local time.
- Fill in all blanks. Use N/A as appropriate.
- Use military 24-hour time.

Communications Discipline

Important considerations related to communications include:

- Observing strict radio/telephone procedures.
- Using plain English in all communications. Codes should not be used in radio transmissions. Limit the use of discipline-specific jargon, especially on interdisciplinary incidents.
- Limiting radio and telephone traffic to essential information only. Plan what you are going to say.
- Following procedures for secure communications as required.

Incident Demobilization

Agency requirements for demobilization may vary considerably. General demobilization guidelines for all personnel are to:

- Complete all work assignments and required forms/reports.
- Brief replacements, subordinates, and supervisor.
- Follow incident and agency check-out procedures.
- Provide adequate followup contact information.
- Return any incident-issued equipment or other nonexpendable supplies.
- Complete postincident reports, critiques, evaluations, and medical followup.
- Complete all payment and/or payroll issues or obligations.
- Report to assigned departure points on time or slightly ahead of schedule.
- Stay with your group until you arrive at your final destination (as appropriate).